# Islam's Concept Of Entertainment

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# Introduction

A question which commonly arises in the minds of the youth is this;

If Islaam forbids singing, dancing, cinemas, clubs and other similar types of romance and entertainment then what exactly does Islaam define as amusement?

I have personally heard many a youth say that Islaam is a very monotonous religion. It seems to promote a life of asceticism where a person is expected to be only occupied with performing salaah and making thikr, after which there is no opportunity to amuse the heart and mind.

This is an important question, because where ever we look today the youth are wholeheartedly devoted to these past times. They are plagued by the thought that if they do not indulge in these past times they would not be able to rid themselves of the resultant boredom. It is with this question in mind that this topic is being addressed.

## Entertainment is a relative term

Firstly, it should be borne is mind that the term 'entertainment' is a relative word. This relativity is borne out in two ways;

1. **Individual relativity:** every individual has a personal notion as to what constitutes entertainment. What may be entertaining to one individual is conversely dull to another. For example there are people in this world who become aroused by inflicting pain *on others*. Psychologists refer to them as sadists. Then there are those who enjoy pain being inflicted *on them*. They are called masochists. Similarly there are people who take pleasure in dancing, watching movies, playing cricket, participating in chess tournaments or drinking.

   There are a countless number of people who would enjoy any one of these past times while at the same time there might be an equal number of people who would find them boring and tedious. **The underlying point here is that 'entertainment' from an individual perspective is a relative term.**

2. **Social relativity:** the concept of amusement may differ from one society to the next. What may be considered as an acceptable form of entertainment in one, may be taboo in another. For example, in Sweden sexual freedom

has reached its peak whereas this understanding of freedom is considered a vice in countries such as Rome and Spain.

In short, the concept of amusement (in a society) will be defined by the societal norms and moral standards set by those societies.

This discussion has highlighted two things:

Firstly, every individual's understanding of entertainment differs to a degree. Therefore, should the norms and standards of society, of which the individual is part of, change, the mental notion of entertainment will fluctuate accordingly.

Secondly, entertainment does not have an absolute standard. This means that no specific activity can be termed "entertainment" to the exclusion of all else. Rather this will be defined by the social structure of every individual society. This is the same social structure which influences its culture, civilization and social mores. In other words those principles by which any society has decided to live by will determine which forms of entertainment are acceptable to it.

Thus it would have become clear to you that those activities which are currently viewed as forms of amusement will not necessarily be so in succeeding generations and societies. **Therefore, were we to put aside this society and build a new society based on Islaamic principles, their view of entertainment would vastly differ.** Similarly anyone migrating into such an Islaamic environment would gradually develop a different understanding of amusement to the current prevailing one.

Before discussing the Islaamic concept of entertainment it would perhaps be more appropriate for us to briefly ponder over current trends of amusement and entertainment. This would help facilitate a better understanding of how contemporary western society formulated their views on entertainment and (in light of that), whether these views are congruous with an Islaamic society or not.

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## The Western concept of entertainment and the movements that influenced it

### 1. Western Philosophy of Life

As has been previously mentioned the West has its own unique philosophy of life. Much has already been discussed in this regard; hence it would be futile to delve into its finer aspects any further. I wish now to merely point out some of its salient features in a very brief and comprehensive manner. This should give us an idea of how modernistic views of entertainment became rampant in a once simple and religious society and which theories gave rise to them.

a) The first movement worthy of mention is the **feminist movement.** Founded by Mary Wollstonecraft[1] it **called for the liberation of women.** The crux of her assertion was that men had enslaved their womenfolk, whose sole responsibilities had become to bear children and live within the confines of the home. For many years she campaigned for the right of women to leave the home, work side by side with their male counter parts and to share equal rights with them. Other people gradually started supporting this movement. As a result philosophical foundations were laid, various 'proofs' for gender equality were established, massive amounts of literature distributed, rallies were organised and every means of propagation and dissemination was used to promote this theory.

   So we see that in order **to create a society where the free intermingling of the sexes** could took place, natural inhibitions were slowly eroded until just such a society was eventually established. As a result, free intermingling greatly increased leading to easy opportunities, both jaiz and na-jaiz (permissible and impermissible), **for the fulfilment of the natural lust felt between the sexes.**

b) In western philosophy there were many persons who championed the cause of women's lib and free intermingling. However in our opinion Sigmund Freud

[1] English author Mary Wollstonecraft wrote one of the first documents of feminism, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women,* in 1792.

stands out as that individual who laid a philosophical basis for it based on the scientific method. Even though his theories have been by and large abandoned today (by the end of the 19th century in fact), he succeeded in establishing an intellectual platform for the supporters of **sexual freedom.**

The basic idea at the heart of Freud's theory is that **man is essentially an animal,** and possesses the same basic instincts as other animal forms. Freud then gives the impression that just as other animals do not adhere to any specific time, mate or etiquette in the fulfilment of their desires, so too should be the case with man. It is only because man has become accustomed to a specific culture that he has established these artificial boundaries upon himself which inhibits him from satisfying these natural instincts.

In an effort to prove this theory, he further argued that when man does not fulfil this urge in a natural manner the way animals do, he knowingly or unknowingly begins to suppress this urge. Subsequently, this becomes the cause of many mental anguishes and psychological ailments.

Please note that are not claiming to have faithfully encapsulated Freud's theory in the above passage, nor do we claim to have done full justice to his dissertation on the matter. Undoubtedly, he has supported his views with numerous (other) proofs. We have merely sought to

succinctly explain the general impressions a lay reader would glean from his views.

c) Another view which the west holds close to its heart is the **doctrine of utility** (aka utilitarianism). Although it is not possible to discuss this theory in detail, **it suffices to say that this doctrine is the heart and soul of materialism.** It is due to this theory that the notion commonly exists in society that only those actions are worthy of being carried out that are materialistically profitable and those actions that are not are unsuitable.

**The harm of this doctrine is that the balance of good and evil is upset.** In fact even those actions which were once considered as morally wrong now have an intellectual basis for becoming legalised if not acceptable. It is this mentality which has prepared society to accept prostitution, the sale of alcohol, the distribution of immoral literature, in short the spread of every immorality for the sake of profit.

It is this very same bomb which has shaken the centuries-old foundations of Christian society. People who once viewed these avenues of income with disdain now open heartedly accept them.

From the womb of Utilitarianism a second social evil was spawned; **the worship of money.** Having being unburdened of the responsibility of differentiating between jaiz and na-jaiz every individual threw himself into amassing wealth and goods in order to raise his/her

standard of living. Both man and woman became so engrossed in the earning of wealth that the majority of their time was spent in the workplace. Consequently little or no time was left for their other social responsibilities, especially their domestic ones. Ironically, even though people embraced this busy lifestyle they were still unable to save themselves from boredom. Hence, the demand for products of entertainment drastically increased in order to stave off the after-work boredom.

So we see that the biggest challenge of the modern age became the pursuit of peace. It is for the attainment of peace that various forms of entertainment were introduced. Sadly, peace and tranquillity remain elusive shadows.

**Another factor which popularised outdoor entertainment was the vociferous anti-religious atheist movement.** Perhaps this was the darkest hour of mankind's history that he sought to deny the existence of Allaah  through "intellect" and "proofs". However, it should be noted that the catalyst for this movement were the archaic views of the church! It is an undisputed fact that the church itself played a role in the establishment of the atheist movement. Briefly, this happened in the following manner:

The church had adopted such views that were exposed by modern science as being patently incorrect. This caused a great amount of consternation amongst the church going

masses. Eventually, on the basis of corporeal knowledge and experience people for all practical purposes divorced themselves from religion. Today despite their being 6 or 7 million Christians in the world they have no ties to religion in their mental and practical outlook on life.

One important consequence of this indifference to religion was that man was now deprived of that peace and tranquillity which he once derived through religion. After a week of sin and vice he could retire into the sanctuary of Allaah, humbly acknowledging his mistakes and shortcomings. Making the thikr of Allaah, peace would descend on his heart.

All of this ceased with the denial of religion. This led to an exponential increase in mans anguish, which in turn, **led to the introduction of various forms of entertainment with the aim of granting relief to this restlessness.**

## 2. Modern Industrial Life

Industry has played a big role in creating the tension felt by modern man. The industrial revolution which rose side by side with modern society and its moral evolution has greatly affected all walks of life. Deserving of mention is the daily work schedule it brought into existence which completely exhausts the labourer, rendering him incapable of undertaking any other beneficial work. After a full day's work manning the mill (for example) a

desire was felt to temporarily escape the dangerous environment of the factory. A need for entertainment was instilled in him in order to break the shackles of monotony and boredom. This need could not be fulfilled at home however as the home had long ago been abandoned. **Therefore the cinema, club or pub became his place of refuge.**

### 3. The Proliferation of Immodesty

Thus we have the trisect of modern civilization: mixed societies, the philosophy of gender equality and the extreme desire for entertainment. Had this been the end of it perhaps things would not have degenerated any further.

Unfortunately another element was added to the mix; **that of free trade (laissez-faire)[2] which caused the spread of immorality and immodesty** on a huge scale. This principle laid the foundation for all forms of media to be utilised; radio television, cinema and the press. Clubs, hotels and dance halls were organised to lend further support to it. This led to two important outcomes. **Firstly, whatever demand existed in the market its supply was met and patrons satisfied. Secondly, those things which people would normally abstain from became so cheap and readily available that the desire to shun them dissipated.** The entire society engulfed in this storm of immorality eventually not only embraced it as a way of life but a necessity. In those places where such demands did not exist,

[2] Laissez-faire (le' zay fe'r) or laisser-faire (le' say fer) :
Principle of no regulation of industry i.e. the theory that the economy works best if private industry is not regulated and markets are free.

false markets were created through advertising and marketing until those areas too succumbed to this madness.

This is an ocean with no shore. With the proliferation of immorality nervous tension has increased in areas commensurate to the ready availability of 'pleasure products' in those areas.

It could be argued that the intermingling of the sexes has somewhat lessened the effects of this tension, to which we will reply by saying that **the diffusion of immorality has no limits,** hence this tension will remain a perpetual problem. The average reader would agree with this supposition. Never the less, we admit that further scientific research is required to investigate the effects of immoral films, literature etc. on the mind and how this tension is created.

# The Demand of Islaam

## 1. Islaam's Foundations of Civilization

To fully appreciate Islaam's concept of entertainment it would be necessary for us to envisage a model Islaamic society. **We have already explained that a society's understanding of entertainment cannot be divorced from its moral and civil code.** Therefore we propose to discuss the civil foundations of an Islaamic society.

### 1.1 Imaan in Allaah 

Acceptance of the tawheed (unity) of Allaah  is the very first fundamental in an Islaamic society. A lot can be said about the moral and sociological aspects of this aqeedah (doctrine). However, for the purposes of the matter at hand Imaan in Allaah  means that the entire society accepts that Allaah is their Haakim (Ruler/Arbiter), Maalik and Master. All facets of live will revolve around this belief. In the entire society collectively not a single decree or institution will exist that is in denial of this belief. **The obligatory outcome of this is that every individual in society will voluntarily surrender himself to the command of Allaah.**

### 1.2 Imaan in the Nabi 

The second fundamental is belief in the Nabi. **The demand of this belief is that whatever the Nabi commanded, the entire**

**society is committed to its adherence, and whatever he ﷺ has prohibited from the entire society abstains from.**

### 1.3 Iman in the Akhirah (Hereafter)

The third fundamental is to believe that there is life after death; that this world is a plantation for the Akhirah. We have not come to remain in world. Rather this world is a temporary abode of examination. The purpose of man is not to become engrossed in this world but to utilise it to gain the pleasure of Allaah ﷻ. The benefit of having this deeply rooted belief present in society is that greed and avarice, which has reached its peak in contemporary society, would be somewhat tempered. This is so because Islaam has taught us that we will be resurrected and an account of every action will be sought. **If this belief of life after death becomes embedded in society the chances of sins spreading will be become significantly lower.**

### 1.4 Inviting towards good and forbidding from evil

A unique feature of Islaamic society is that it is the responsibility of every individual to encourage and forbid evil. This means that if any sin arises in the community it is the responsibility of society as a whole not only to condemn it but to put a stop to it and to correct it. The effect of this mutual encouragement towards righteousness is **that virtue will spread and evil will dissipate.**

### 1.5 Resolute moral guidelines

Islaam has also stipulated strong moral guidelines in which the boundaries of socialising and mutual friendship have been clearly delineated. This means that Islaam has not left mankind unchecked. It has given him guidelines for every situation and has showed him the limits of every action. **Modern society is an unbridled one, without a specific purpose in life.** It will wander into whatever direction it wishes and then invent some philosophy to make it acceptable. Conversely, in an Islaamic society should any corruption arise it will be reformed and aligned once again in conformity to the moral code. At no point will any attempt be made to condone that wrong. This is the fundamental difference between contemporary society and an Islaamic one.

1.6 The role of women is in the home

While discussing the fundamentals of an Islaamic civilization we have especially mentioned Islaam's social code as it is the corruption of this that the west has termed as amusement. Part of the social code of conduct we have been given states that;

a) **Men are the guardians of women.** In other words women are the subordinates of men.

b) **The role of women is in the home,** so that a domestic system can be structured. The west has abandoned the home so both man and women have to leave the house to find leisure and peace. As long as the home was inhabited, the man would return home from work and find contentment there. No sooner was the home destroyed (meaning that family structure was

deconstructed) that it lost its appeal and the man sought fun outside the home.

c) **The intermingling of the sexes and society in all its forms are haraam (prohibited).** Be it in co-ed schools, hospitals, airplanes, offices or factories. A crucial result of this would be that opportunities for sexual fireworks created by the free intermingling of the sexes would be extinguished.

d) **If a need exists the husband has been allowed to legally contract a maximum of four marriages,** provided that he is able to acquit himself justly. This serves to maintain the family structure. Furthermore, this not only shuts the door on promiscuity but in this controlled environment, any children born out of this union will be given official recognition and full protection. The present pitiable condition of illegitimate children is witnessed by all; a direct result of closing the doors to marriage and opening them to zina (sexual immorality).

e) **Illicit love affairs and its public display will be prohibited.** An Islaamic society will severely curtail any persons from seeking opportunities to establish illicit relationships with somebody's innocent daughter. This will not be tolerated at any cost. In this manner widespread sexual-lust will not be created in the society.

f) **The hadd (capital punishment) for defamation will be implemented.** Not only will the honour of a chaste woman be protected but no malevolent will dare glance at another's daughter lasciviously. Otherwise we find that some wicked people use public gatherings as an opportunity to ogle women.

Consequently such a society will be formed where the natural sexual urges will be moderated and it (society) will be cleansed of mixed gatherings, cinemas, immoral movies, passionate songs, lustful music and all other instruments which cause the proliferation of immodesty. Thereafter if a person still has a need to calm his sexual urge, he has permission to legally take a second wife, provided that he is able to fulfil all her obligatory rights. Judge for yourself to what extent the gloom of today's society will be dispelled and to what extent the dissatisfied voices of the youth will dissipate.

## 2. Islaam's Industrial Life

Even though this topic does not fall under the purview of our discussion, a few words, never the less will be said about it. As has been previously explained, modern society has so entrapped man in his daily toil that he has become the sum total of his stomach and body only. Islaam on the other hand discourages us from becoming so busy that we become slaves of our appetites only. Our wives, children, parents, relatives, neighbours etc all have rights over us. Furthermore we need to fulfil the rights of Allaah □. We have social responsibilities as well, such as amr bil

ma'roof –enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil etc. This balanced lifestyle produces two important benefits;

1. The stress engendered by modern industry will be greatly reduced. Hence the demand for entertainment will proportionately diminish.

2. Every person would be able to spend quality time with their wives, children, parents, siblings and relatives which would be a source of great harmony. This is an ideal which everybody can easily understand. Allaah  Himself has stated in the Quran Kareem that your spouses have been created for mutual comfort.

### 3. Ibadat and Thikr of Allaah 

**In an Islaamic society every individual has been made responsible for some form of physical and monetary ibadat.** In fact every act of obedience to Allaah is an act of ibadat. Some time will be set aside at home or the Musjid for thikr. It is stated in the Quraan;

*Listen! It is (only) through thikr of Allaah that the hearts attain peace.* ***(Surah Rád v 28)***

In light of this it can be concluded that mankind is bereft of peace, hence he continuously seeks out new forms of entertainment to appease his restlessness, but to no avail because the peace and tranquillity which he seeks is in the thikr of Allaah

▯. Seeking it elsewhere is a futile effort. Contemporary society is proof enough of this.

## What Forms of Entertainment does Islaam Approve of?

After this entire discussion we now return to our original question. By now it would have become crystal clear what type of society Islaam wishes to establish and what type of human being it wishes to create.

Islaam wishes to create such a human being that has a strong bond with Allaah ▯ and at the same time he is a soldier of Allaah ▯. What possible interest would such a human being, as envisaged by Islaam, living in an Islaamic environment have with modern societies' idea of amusement? In fact it can be said without any fear of contradiction that a Muslim living in an Islaamic society will not only be disinterested in these types of entertainment but will view them with disgust as well.

All these forms of entertainment which were spawned by modern society will find no place in an Islaamic civilization. Furthermore this great need to be constantly entertained will be greatly

reduced and replaced with natural forms of leisure. **Islaam has only placed restrictions on those forms of entertainment that are inherently malicious or a catalyst for the diffusion of evil in society.**

Finally, as regards the question that if dancing, singing, cinemas, clubs etc are haraam in Islaam then what forms of entertainment remain, so it will be admitted that these are not the only forms of entertainment there is. There are various types of sport e.g. hockey, football, cricket, badminton etc. There are also indoor games, outdoor safaris to see the world of Allaah , picnics, horse riding, exercise and many other forms of play. **In short Islaam has only restricted those activities which contain the elements of illicit romances and intoxicants and all those activities which lead to illicit romances and intoxicants.** All other forms of fun and amusement are permissible.

If we can envisage such an Islaamic society and then make an effort to adopt Islaam in our lies, **we would very quickly realise that the various forms of amusement in contemporary society, which in reality was introduced to release sexual tensions, has no place in an Islaamic society.** In fact no person of sane disposition could possibly stomach it. **The only reason we are attracted to it is because we have patterned our societies along western lines and have adopted their lifestyles as our own.** Attraction to these types of amusement is a result of that.

Translation edited by

***A.H.Elias (Mufti)***

*May Allaah be with him*

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